

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS' EDUCATIONAL ANXIETY AND SCHOOL CHILDREN'S ACADEMIC BURNOUT

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### Abstract

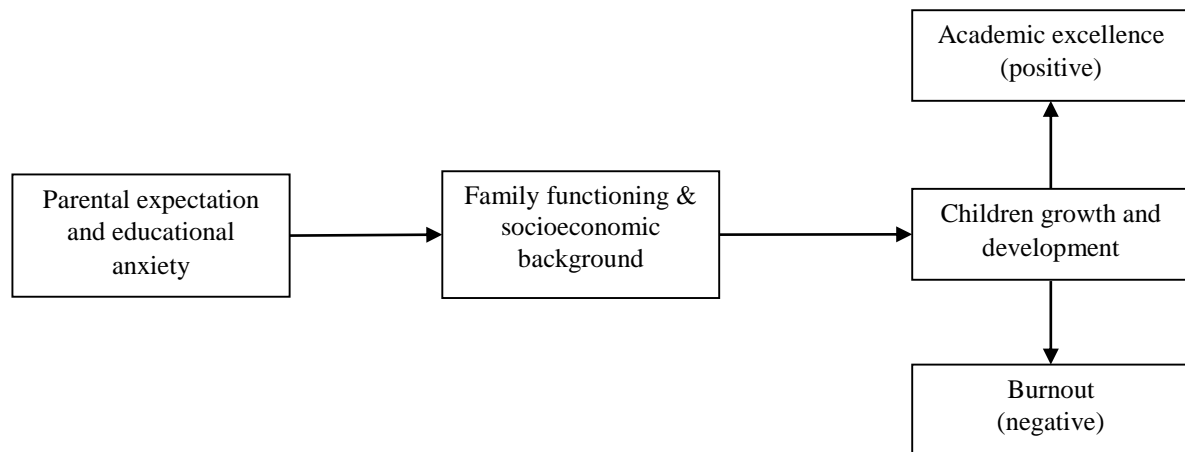
Educational anxiety has become an important issue in family education. School is an important developmental context for children, but it has been criticized for developing harmful psychological disorders such as academic burnout. The objective of this study is to determine the relationship between parents' educational anxiety and children's academic burnout. The study was conducted at a primary school in Hangzhou City in the northern part of Zhejiang Province, China. It involved 150 respondents, consisting of an equal ratio of fathers and mothers of the school children. The result indicated that parents' education anxiety is at a very high level, whereas the level of children's academic burnout is also high. Further analysis reveals that the correlation between Pearson's product "parental educational anxiety" and "school children's academic burnout" was very high, positive, and statistically significant ( $r = .958$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This suggests that an increase in parents' educational anxiety will lead to academic burnout for children. The insights gained from this research can be instrumental in making significant changes to classroom practices, parent-child relationships, and school-parent engagement, leading to a healthier and more productive academic experience for children.

**Keywords:** *Educational Anxiety, Burnout, Children's Development, School Environment*

## INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 20th century, China has undergone a turbulent transformation from an ancient feudal society towards a modern society. Education has been given great importance in various reform agendas (Guo et al., 2019). Greater investment in education, stronger policy interventions ensuring more equitable access to nine-year compulsory education, and a significantly increased lower secondary enrolment have contributed to the considerable reduction in illiteracy rates (Morgan et al., 2020). Despite this, school has been criticized for developing harmful psychological disorders, such as academic burnout (Ma, 2021). In addition, recent studies by Liu et al. (2022) stated that Chinese parents experience some degree of educational anxiety and have thus become an important issue within family education in China.

Parental educational anxiety refers to the nervousness, uneasiness, anxiety, worry, panic, and other emotions experienced by parents in the process of educating their children (Chen et al., 2022). This is due to the uncertainty brought about by educational results, which is manifested as excessive panic among parents about their children's academic performance, employment prospects, and life prospects. Parents' anxiety may influence their engagement with their children's education, and is viewed as a factor that generates stress in children (Liu et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2022). Thus, the children of parents who express relatively more concern reportedly display more signs of anxiety. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between parents' educational anxiety and children's growth and development. In general, parental educational anxiety can have a complex impact on students' academic performance.



**Figure 1.** The conceptual framework of the relationship between parents' educational anxiety and children's burnout

Parental socioeconomic background plays a significant role in shaping expectations for children's school performance (Dockery et al., 2022). High parental expectations can positively influence children's academic confidence and their performance (Hu et al., 2024). However, some researchers argue that educational anxiety has more negative connotations, goes against the normal development of children to a certain extent, and hinders the normal development of education (Wang & Huang, 2023). Furthermore, Wu et al. (2022) explained that this development was moderated by family functioning, with parental educational anxiety reducing children's academic burnout when family functioning was better. Due to that, parental educational expectations appear to contribute to child development and may be mediated individually and sequentially by educational anxiety and parental involvement (Xin & Yu, 2024).

Studies have found that the higher the educational expectations of parents, the greater the psychological pressure on children, and the more likely they are to develop withdrawal

behaviours such as avoidance and boredom, or emotional distress such as anxiety, and even various life adjustment problems (Xu et al., 2024). In addition, Wu et al. (2022) suggested that parental burnout played a complete mediating role between parents' education anxiety and children's academic burnout. Both scholars agreed that the relationship between education anxiety and parental burnout was moderated by family function, and higher family function buffered the effect of education anxiety on parental burnout. The present study proposes to examine the limited relationship between parental educational anxiety and school children's academic burnout.

Kleszczewska-Albińska (2024) states that children dealing with extreme schoolwork overload, accompanied by poor time management, unrealistic goals, and excessive family demands, disturbances in sleep habits, poor eating habits, and limited or no physical exercise, are more prone to develop and sustain symptoms of school burnout. Academic burnout is school children's emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and low personal accomplishment due to academic pressure, academic load, or other personal psychological factors in the learning process (Pamungkas & Nurlaili, 2022). It leads to serious matters such as losing learning motivation, exhaustion, low academic achievement, and so on.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The design of the study applied is a cross-sectional survey. These observational studies analyze data from a population at a single point in time (X. Wang & Cheng, 2020). Data collection through this method is fast as well as low-cost, and is very useful in descriptive studies (Zangirolami-Raimundo et al., 2018). The study was conducted at one of the primary schools in Hangzhou of Zhejiang Province, China. At the time of study, the enrollment at the school was about 1,000 students from Primary 1 (aged 6) to Primary 6 (aged 11). As suggested by Singh and Masuku (2014), the researcher targets a sample size ranging from approximately 172 to 187 pupils through a stratified random sampling. Based on this technique, the heterogeneous population of students (pupils) is divided into homogeneous groups according to their age and level of schooling. Specifically, the study focuses on Primary 5 (aged 10) and Primary 6 (aged 11) students, as well as their parents. By including both students and their parents in the sample, the researcher aims to gather comprehensive insights into the research topic from multiple perspectives. This approach enhances the richness and depth of the data collected, enabling a more thorough analysis and interpretation of the findings.

The questionnaire on parents' educational anxiety is adapted from Sun et al. (2022). The questionnaire consists of 25 items, divided into six domains, which are learning attitude (6 items), school performance (7 items), educational capacity (5 items), educational outcome (4 items), and family capital (3 items). The second part of the questionnaire to measure the children's academic burnout is adapted from Hu and Schaufeli (2009). The question consists of 15 items and is divided into three domains, which are emotional exhaustion (5 items), cynicism (5 items), and academic efficiency (5 items). The respondents' feedback was measured on a five-point Likert scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The involvement of parents and students in this study is with the permission of the school. Through the school office, the researcher contacts the Committee Members of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), explaining the study's objectives and requesting their support. After identifying the potential respondents (the parents) and the minimum required number, the researcher used a random sampling method to distribute the questionnaire.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Reliability of the instrument

The measure of internal consistency of the instrument (questionnaire) is based on Cronbach's Alpha value ( $\alpha$ ). Generally, a value of  $\alpha > 0.8$  is considered stable (Kotian et al., 2022). Based on the analysis, it was found that each domain recorded a value of  $\alpha > 0.8$ , except cynicism, which recorded  $\alpha = 0.797$  for children's academic burnout. The highest  $\alpha$  value recorded is for school performance (0.911) and learning attitude (0.909). The detail of the score is shown in Table 1a, and the interpretation is in Table 1b below. Once the values of Alpha are acceptable, the researcher may proceed to further statistical tests and deductions (Jugessur, 2022). Despite popular belief and frequent reporting, there is no standard, threshold, or criterion value for an acceptable alpha (Barbera et al., 2021). It is argued that a high value of alpha offers limited evidence of the reliability of a research instrument, and that indeed a very high value may be undesirable when developing a test of scientific knowledge or understanding (Taber, 2018).

**Table 1a:** Cronbach's Alpha value for each research domain and construct

No.	Research Construct and Domain	No. of Item	Alpha Cronbach Value ( $\alpha$ )	Level of Consistency
1.	Parental educational anxiety	25	0.976	Excellent
	a) Learning attitude	6	0.909	Excellent
	b) School performance	7	0.911	Excellent
	c) Educational capacity	5	0.891	Good
	d) Educational outcome	4	0.868	Good
	e) Family capital	3	0.813	Good
2.	Children academic burnout	15	0.938	Excellent
	a) Emotional exhaustion	5	0.829	Good
	b) Cynicism	4	0.797	Satisfactory
	c) Academic efficiency	6	0.862	Good

**Table 1b:** Cronbach's Alpha value of reliability and acceptability (Kotian et al., 2022)

Range of Cronbach's Alpha Value	Instrument Reliability
> 0.90	High Consistency / Excellent
0.80 to < 0.89	Good Consistency/ Good
0.70 to 0.79	Acceptable Consistency / Satisfactory
0.65 to 0.69	Marginal Consistent / Fair
< 0.50	Inconsistent / Weak

## Population and sampling

A total of 150 parents have returned the questionnaire forms. The ratio between fathers and mothers is almost equal (47 – 53%). Most of them are aged above 30 years old (69.3%) and hold a bachelor's degree qualification (66.1%). They represent all levels of children at the school, from preschool to upper secondary. As for the children, only a small percentage of them have their family member or relative working as a teacher (17.3%). About one-third of the students attended extra-curricular classes every week (32.0%). However, most of the children attended the activities without a clear understanding or awareness of the benefits of joining those activities (72.7%).

Basically, extracurricular activities play an indispensable role in shaping well-rounded individuals, contributing significantly to both personal and academic growth (Samuel., 2024). Early studies suggested that parents influenced children's participation in leisure activity choices, leisure values, and their ideas about roles that leisure time and activities play throughout their lives (Shannon, 2006). Male parents had higher personal development levels and provided more social support for their children to participate in extracurricular activities (Topuz, 2020). Besides, parents with higher educational status had higher personal development levels and academic perceptions compared to parents with lower educational status.

## Parents' and children's perspectives on family bonding

As for the first research question (RQ1), the score shows that the family bonding is at a medium level for both parents' perspectives (6.4733) and children's (5.9560). This indicates that parents are more aware of the importance of having a good relationship with their children, having high expectations for their children to perform well in education, to create a good engagement with teachers and school, and to be more committed to supporting their children's activities at school. The details of the score are shown in Table 2a, and the interpretation is in Table 2b below.

Parental bonding is an important predictor that gives a lot of insight into the parent-child relationship. Closeness in the family is usually shown through the existence of good family relationships, including mutual understanding and respect for each other, between parents and children (Bardosono et al., 2017). Stronger parental bonding promotes better parent-child relationships (Lian, 2008). Besides, females were found to have better parental bonding as well as parent-child relationships compared to males. From a cultural aspect, there is no difference among races in terms of parental bonding and parent-child relationships. In-depth analysis by Roman et al. (2025) found that the constructs of cohesion, adaptability, communication, and support are deeply interconnected and consistently predictive of positive outcomes in academic achievement, mental health, and social competence. These dynamics are shaped by contextual variables such as socioeconomic status and contemporary stressors, including the use of technology. Based on the findings of the above study, the researchers suggested that there is a positive tendency that the relationship between parental educational anxiety and children's burnout can be controlled if there is a good level of family bonding.

**Table 2a:** A score of parents' and children's perception of family bonding

Construct	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Parent (family bonding)	6.4733	.77186	.596
Children (family bonding)	5.9560	.74793	.559

**Table 2b:** Interpretation of the mean score for family bonding

Range of Mean Score	Interpretation
1.00 – 2.11	Very, very low
2.12 – 3.22	Very low
3.23 – 4.33	Low
4.34 – 5.44	Medium low
5.45 – 6.55	Medium
6.56 – 7.66	Medium high
7.67 – 8.77	High
8.78 – 10.00	Very high

### Parent educational anxiety and children's academic burnout

The second and third research questions (RQ2, RQ3) are about the level of parents' educational anxiety and their children's academic burnout. The level of parental education anxiety is very high (4.3544) for a 5-point Likert scale. The highest score is for the family capital domain (4.3556), and the lowest is for educational capacity and educational income (4.3467). The next analysis of children's academic burnout revealed a high level (5.8253) on a 7-point Likert scale. The highest score is for the cynicism domain (5.833), and the lowest is academic efficiency (5.8156). The details are in Tables 3a, 3b, and 3c below.

Generally, it was said that the social, cultural, and economic capital of students' families was all substantially related to their academic achievement in school, and the greater the family capital, the higher the students' academic achievement (Zhu, 2023). Family capital not only directly affects students' academic achievement but also indirectly affects it by influencing their academic goals. Cynicism is a situation where students develop frustration and negative attitudes due to unmet expectations at educational institutions (Kasalak, 2022). Academic cynicism focuses on students' views on the courses they take in the educational process and is one of the important predictors of academic burnout and career commitment. Academic cynicism was negatively associated with career commitment and positively associated with academic burnout. Thus, children's cynicism had significant, negative, and low-level relationships with pessimism, life dissatisfaction, and trust in interpersonal relationships.

**Table 3a:** Mean score for each of the constructs and domains of study

No.	Construct of the study (domain)	Mean	Level	Standard Deviation	Variance
1.	Parental educational anxiety*	4.3544	Very High	0.64025	0.410
	i. Learning attitude	4.3567	Very High	0.67612	0.457
	ii. School performance	4.3619	Very High	0.63687	0.406
	iii. Educational capacity	4.3467	Very High	0.66662	0.444
	iv. Educational outcome	4.3467	Very High	0.70817	0.501
	v. Family capital	4.3556	Very High	0.67849	0.460
2.	Children's academic burnout**	5.8253	High	0.84939	0.721
	i. Emotional exhaustion	5.8307	High	0.89555	0.802

ii.	Cynicism	5.8333	High	0.92670	0.859
iii.	Academic efficiency	5.8156	High	0.88385	0.781

\*5-point Likert scale / \*\*6-point Likert scale

### The final findings of the study

The final analysis (RQ4) is to find a relationship between parental educational anxiety and school children's academic burnout. The proposed hypothesis is that parents' educational anxiety has a positive influence on school children's academic burnout ( $H_1$ ). Based on the values shown in Tables 4.a, 4.b, and 4.c, the results are:

- i. The correlation of Pearson's product "parental educational anxiety" to "school children's academic burnout" was very high, positive, and statistically significant ( $r = .958$ ,  $p < .001$ ). So,  $H_1$  is supported. This suggests that an increase in educational anxiety among parents will lead to academic burnout for children.
- ii. The highest  $r$  coefficient value recorded is 0.885 ( $r = .885$ ,  $p < .001$ ) for the relationship between parents' concern about their children's learning attitude on children's academic efficiency. It means that the increase in parents' awareness of their children's learning ability will greatly increase children's academic efficiency
- iii. The lowest  $r$  coefficient value recorded is 0.812 ( $r = .812$ ,  $p < .001$ ) for the relationship between parents' family capital on children's cynicism. It means any changes to parents' family capital will highly impact on children's attitude or motivation related to education.

In conclusion, the findings provide a valuable overview of the relationship between parental educational anxiety and the tendency for academic burnout in school children. It highlights the general agreement on the positive role of these variables, while also revealing the variability in responses, indicating the complexity and multifaceted nature of these relationships. However, it's important to note that these are hypothetical values, and the actual values will depend on the responses received from the respondents.

### CONCLUSION

The present study confirmed that parents' educational anxiety could be associated with children's academic burnout, especially regarding their unmet expectations of the school. The results of the current study provide a valuable and unique contribution to extant literature by expanding the understanding of the pathways through which parent and school engagement may influence children's learning. The current findings further highlight the crucial roles of parents, teachers, and communities in children's psychological development, social and academic learning.

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